

Gospel of Matthew

24:1~16

The End of the World As We Know It!
(the rules – Go get your Bible and follow along)



Two weeks ago we hosted one of our bi-annual Wild Game Feasts and a couple of hours later, I came down with an itchy lung. By the next day it developed into a real cough. By noon I was coming down with a fever. Then by that Tuesday, the fever started going up, and by Wednesday it was really high for me – 102°! It was miserable with extreme body aches! By Thursday the fever was going down, and by Friday morning it seemed to be pretty much over already. I felt pretty good. I knew that I needed to go to the dump, so I loaded up the truck and off I went. I had heard about the weird run on toilet paper at the stores, so on the way, I decided to stop at Walgreens to see if they had any. At 10 in the morning, the parking lot was FULL – two lines of cars wrapped around both sides of the front of the store! That is when it dawned on me - *“Hey – this is real! Something is happening here that I have not seen before. People are really stocking up, getting ready to make a stand in their own home! The killer flu is coming to Clintonville!”* I was thinking that I was seeing our world change in one day! Well, the store *was* mostly out of TP, but low and behold they had **one** nice-sized package of 12 rolls! I snatched it off the shelf and proudly marched up to the checkout counter! I remember thinking to myself – *“This is what it feels like,.. to be a WINNER!”*.



People are preparing for a disaster they have been told is coming, is indeed here, and, of course we need to! We are actually being made to, and that is probably good or it just wouldn't happen! Previous to this Corona virus thing, I had intended on skipping over chapter 24 in our journey through Matthew and returning to it later – after Easter – since I have been trying to get to the plot, the betrayal, the trial, and the cross of Christ – before Easter. But I figured that I had better deal with the obvious this week. This COVID – 19 pandemic has an *“end of the world”* feeling to it unlike anything any of us have ever encountered within our national borders. There have been other disease scares that were able to be contained. But this flu pandemic is *not* contained. It has spread all over the world.

Matthew 24 has “end of the world” written all over it! Now, I cannot treat this chapter 24 as it deserves. With Resurrection Sunday coming up quickly, I have to give you the chap. 24-light version so we can get as far along as possible before diverting to the Passion of the Christ and resurrection. Plus, I am no prophecy expert. I know a few things, or at least I think I do, but then I also think that prophecy is a slippery thing to try to get a solid handle on. The language moves and shifts on us, and ends up making fools of anyone who tries to say they know exactly what the prophet originally meant – or the meaning intended by Spirit of God that directed the words of prophet. Prophecy most often uses apocalyptic language, an ancient form of literature that is well, beautiful/often terrifying, but confusing to say the least. It drifts in and out of the past, present, and future – refers to contemporary figures which may at the same time refer to future figures also. In other words, King David for instance, a prophet in his own right, when He went into prophesy mode, could be speaking of Himself and yet also be referring a future Messianic figure – and it can be an unmistakable reference to the future Christ Jesus in particular! Anyway, it is hard to pin down, but there *are* important truths and insights that can be gained from prophecy.

The prophetic/apocalyptic language of Jesus in chapter 24 is also quite difficult to discern. I know the disciples were looking for answers, but certainly did not come away from this any the wiser. Probably they were far more confused at the end than at the beginning of this treatise by Jesus.

- Vs. 1 - The disciples gawking and pointing like tourists at the impressive architecture. And Jesus suddenly prophesies that it will all be torn down! Now, He had been prophesying of his impending murder on a number of occasions leading up to chapter 24, and now He prophesies that His immediate enemies – the religious powers that be in Jerusalem were going to “*sow the wind*” when they killed him, and then “*reap the whirlwind*” in the future! The city and temple they so loved would be torn down. Their country would be destroyed! Indeed, in 70 A.D. it happened in just that way. The Romans fought hard to quell a stubborn rebellion in Judea, and then having to fight far harder than they had expected, and having lost all patience with the feisty Jews, they went on to tear down all the magnificent structure of Jerusalem. In 135, they would finally banish the Jews from their own land and rename it - Palestine!
- “*What will be the sign of your coming?*” the disciples ask. Despite Jesus having discouraged this self-serving notion a number of times in the past, the disciples still hoped and expected that Jesus will go away but return a conquering King “*at the end of the age*”! They are right about that, but certainly we know now that He would not return within their lifetimes.
- They asked Him what the “*sign*” of His coming would be. What they were asking was about when he would take the reigns of power and be the King of the World? They thought it would be within their lifetimes and they were certain they would ascend to power with Him, so their question contained a lot of self-interest!
- Instead of answering directly, Jesus did what He so often had done previously – He answers the way *He* wants to answer, but does not answer what they asked. He does not tell them their question is stupid, but just launches into something else. That something else is a memorable warning to them and to the early church and then to all the churches throughout the church age that difficult times lay ahead.

Vs. 4 - The first warning Jesus gives is that they will face great attempts at deception in the future. Jesus says that the Deceiver will attack the His identity first. Christ-followers would be siphoned off from following the *true* Christ by agreeing with some slick and persuasive, charismatic type of false teachers to following a Christ by a different definition. This truly happened to the early church. False teachers were a big deal in the early church. Most of the efforts of the apostles went toward educating the early churches into a unified, “orthodox” definition of Christ. In fact the gospel accounts compiled from eyewitnesses of Jesus of the life and ministry of Christ were written to combat the myths that were growing up around Jesus, by people who had never personally seen or heard Him - some of which were preposterous! Christianity is based in **real history – real people** – not myth! We honor truth! If we lose the truth, we lose everything! The truth needs no embellishment from humans to make it better or more exciting! The life of the True Christ was obviously loaded with fantastic, hard- to-believe events (we call them miracles) that only the power of the Creator-God could have accomplished! It did not need made-up things to make it even better. That only perverted and warped the real story line, and to those that swallowed those lies, they would inevitably separate themselves and form a different group – a rival group to the **true church of the true Christ**. Church history tells us that this happened all the time from early on and down through the centuries. It has always happened and is happening today. People claiming to be the returned Christ! Not too many of those as in the west we tend to think they are what they are – *crazy*! But in these current times you have people thinking it is okay to redefine Christ and redefine His teachings that they might find offensive – no a good cultural match! That is why we have worked so hard around here to make sure we know who Christ is according to the apostles teaching and what He taught! If we know the true Christ, we will be able to spot a false one when we see it – a mile away!

- 4-14 – Jesus is warning and trying to prepare His present and future disciples (I think) for the fact that the infancy of Christianity would be a violent and difficult one. Early Christians would suffer for having taken on the identity of a Christ-follower. He predicts that his followers must live and serve His interests and purposes in the midst of regional and global upheaval and under the opposition and murderous enmity of their own cultures and peoples. These predictions of wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes are quite non-specific and could describe just about any span of time since the beginnings of civilization!
- In 9-12 – Jesus predicts/prophesies that many Christians would die terrible deaths for having the audacity to continue to follow Him despite being told by the authorities that it was unlawful! Many would suffer all manner of earthly loss in the face of persecution because of their undying commitment to Jesus! Sadly, Jesus predicted that many others would “turn away” under the same pressures. Churches would divide under the extreme pressures and anxiety as congregants and leaders broke ranks and attacked each other! Of course, the unrelenting persecution would lead many to favor their doubts and fears until they no longer believed. *“Where is He? Why is He not doing something to help me?!”*
- Vs. 12 - The love of “*most*” would grow cold because of the increase of wickedness. This is the power of culture. The power to distract, weaken, to dilute. Christians do not want to be social pariahs. We see that among many Christians today. The desire for acceptance and the accolades from culture. I reminds of me of high school. Everyone wanted acceptance from “the cool kids”! This desire can become overpowering, so we rationalize and adopt the values and wisdom of the world – the world system that opposes God! But it is extremely seductive, deceiving and destroying the faith of those that we thought were true Christ-followers! We are surprised and devastated by these defections and betrayals. Yet Jesus told us that it would happen, and it *has* throughout the church age! We should not be surprised at all!

➤ Vs. 13 – “***But those who stand firm to the end will be saved!***” Despite the setbacks, the gospel would go on. The faithful people who did not succumb to the pressures and the siren song of culture would continue on-task, says Jesus. Christians are evangelists. It is who we are! Christ-followers tell people about the Living Christ – and He IS alive! That is why Easter is so important to us! But this is our message and we must deliver it! It is what we do and it is what the true followers of Jesus have ***always done*** despite the distain, despite the animosity, and despite suffering loss in all the earthly things that others value most and live for! **This latest virus scare** forces us to realize at a deeper level that all things of this earth are insecure, and all things are temporary, and all things are vanity, and all things are meaningless, and it ***all*** will be lost in the end! But only the love of Christ remains when all is said and done! That is ***the Christian perspective on life!*** We have invested the true value of our life, in Christ and in His purposes! The other stuff – the natural desire for money, possessions, status, respect, honor, power, pleasure, security, ease – all takes a back seat ***in*** the life of the Christ-follower to the purposes of God in Christ! When He orders us to tell the world about Him and to influence and persuade people to transfer their allegiance to Him, those are our marching orders! This is our identity! So in times like this, when all things material – indeed life itself – is/are threatened – it is not time to despair! We haven’t lost who we are and what we do! Not even close! Our lives are given significant only in our relationship with Christ and in the purposes He has graced our lives with! Despite suffering loss, ***maybe everything***, in every other area of life, we are going to be okay! We still have Jesus, and nothing and no one can change ***that!*** We still have forever-life with Him reserved for us! That is of far greater value than ***this*** perilous and temporary existence. In perilous times like these, it is especially good to be a Christ-follower! It has always been so, and it is still true today! What we have, the salvation of our souls and communion with God is securely in the hands of God who does not change and who does not renounce His own!

- **Vs 15-22** - Most theologians believe this section is a reference to the reconquest Judea by the Romans in 70 A.D. and of the terrible price that Jerusalem is forced to finally pay for their many rebellions. The people would suffer terribly during this time. The very culture that had made crucifixion commonplace would show no mercy!
- Some believe it is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem **AND** a future time that we have not seen yet - when the great dam of God's patience bursts and the wrath of God that has piled up behind it for millenniums will be poured out on a human race that has sunk to offensive depths the likes of which we cannot comprehend – which only God knows! These theologians believe this is a reference to *the end of the end times*. Now, the “*end times*” or “*last days*” began at the cross of Christ and have continued to this day. But the apostle John's apocalypse or book of Revelation would add credence to this view. It is in line with the description of Jesus in Matt. 24, especially the last half of the chapter. But John describes wave after wave of God's terrible judgement and wrath unleashed upon a rebel earth at the very end! It also describes a rebellion on earth so stubborn, so at the core of the human heart, that it must be pummeled again and again and again until it is crushed and all resistance against earth's Creator is quelled! God's righteous judgment does that! That is the time when Jesus returns in power (**Rev. 19:11-16**), Satan is taken out of the picture and locked in what is described as a “bottomless pit”, and the earth is freed from its ancient oppressor, Satan, and is finally able to surrender to its Creator and rightful owner. Then, and only then will Jesus rule in peace – for a thousand years, it says!

I'm going to leave off of Matthew 24. The apostles Paul, Peter, and John referred to the end which is mixed with the judgement and wrath of God. We know that is coming! Maybe it has begun already. I really don't know. I do know the earth is in trouble right now – that much is clear! There is certainly a present uptick in the very things that Jesus mentions here. But more importantly - how are you and I to react in times

q [1 Thess. 5:1-11] 5:4 - **“But you, brothers...”**

1 Pet. 4:7 – “*The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.*” That is how we are called to react. We pray. We don't lose sight of our mission! We remain unified! We love each other! We perfect the fruit of the Spirit under duress – **“*Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*”**. We prove who we are and the strength of our Leader by how we react to times like these.